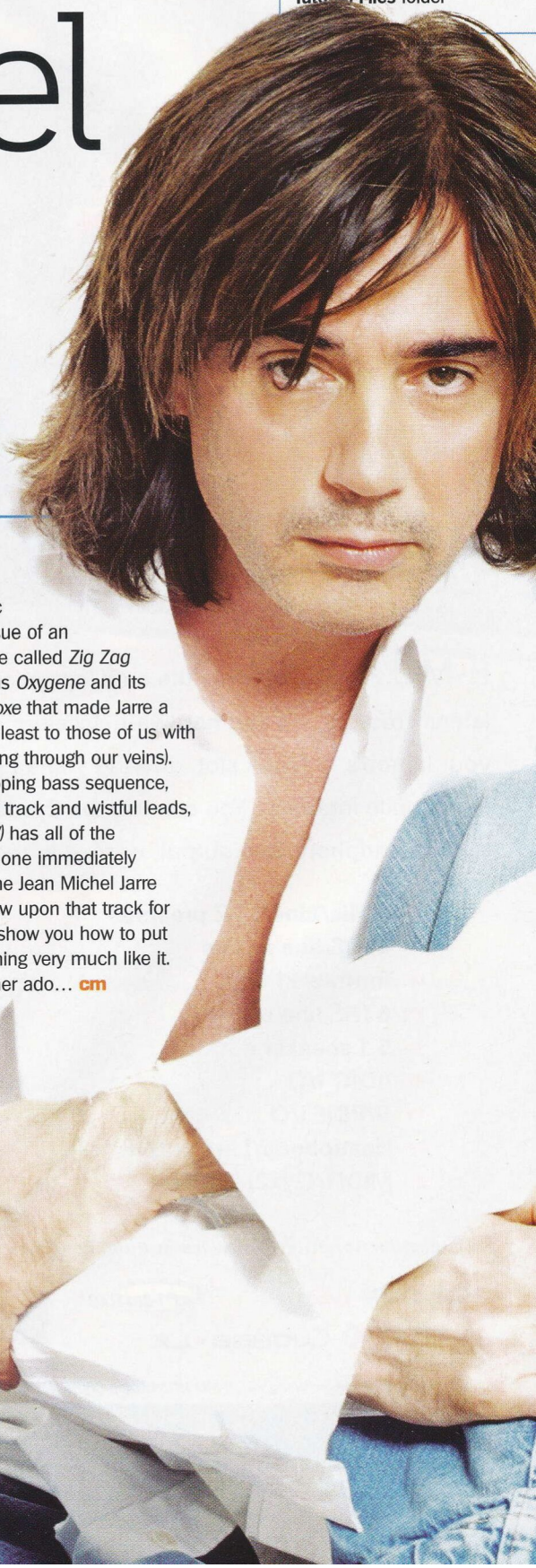
NEXT MONTH
PLUMP DJS

Sound like...

Jean Michel Jarre

Mac PC

Yes, it's the king of electronic music himself! Recreate his unique sound in software...



In this month's instalment of *Sound like...*, we're going to take a break from contemporary popular music. Though the artist in question is still cranking out innovative and interesting discs, as well as staging blockbuster live events, we're going to concentrate on his best-known cut: *Oxygene*. This groundbreaking platter was issued in 1976 and remains a classic to this day. Monsieur Jarre's deft programming and considered arrangements bolster *Oxygene's* sprightly melodies, while sweeping, filtered noises provide a suitably atmospheric backdrop. It's an irresistible brew, and one that informs and inspires many modern electronic musicians. Indeed, it's in response to the requests of many of you, dear readers, that we turn our attention to this most successful of modern Gaelic cultural exports.

In our era of pre-fab cookie-cutter pop stars, it seems hard to believe that adventurous instrumentalists such as Jarre, Mike Oldfield and Tangerine Dream once visited the album charts with some regularity. These brave artists took advantage of the recent advances of multitrack studios to craft soundscapes that might not have been possible only a few years before. It's the very sort of thing that we're doing today with our humble desktop computers.

Jean Michel Jarre made his first serious impressions on electronic music fans with the issue of an EMS-laden single called *Zig Zag Dance*, but it was *Oxygene* and its follow-up *Equinoxe* that made Jarre a cultural icon (at least to those of us with electrons coursing through our veins).

With its galloping bass sequence, tick-tock rhythm track and wistful leads, *Oxygene (Part IV)* has all of the ingredients that one immediately recognises as the Jean Michel Jarre sound. We'll draw upon that track for inspiration and show you how to put together something very much like it. So, without further ado... **cm**

On the DVD

TUTORIAL FILES
Everything you need to recreate the distinctive 'Jarre' sound can be found in the **Tutorial Files** folder

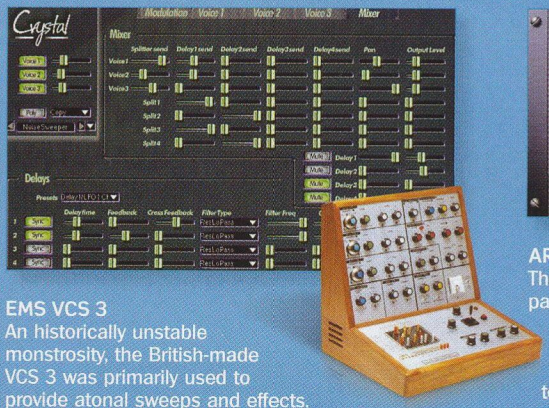
Discography

ALBUMS
Oxygene 1976
Equinoxe 1978
Magnetic Fields 1981
Zoolook 1984 *(highly recommended for fans of old-school sampling!)*
Rendez-vous 1986
Oxygene 7-13 1997

HARDWARE TO SOFTWARE: Who needs boxes when you've got these

Rhythmin' Computer

Jarre called upon a great number of cheesy beatboxes, including the mysterious Rhythmin' Computer, the Eko Computerythm and the Korg Minipops. Being aficionados of electronic percussion ourselves, we have our own electronic beatbox in the form of the LinPlug CM-505, which you can find on the cover DVD.



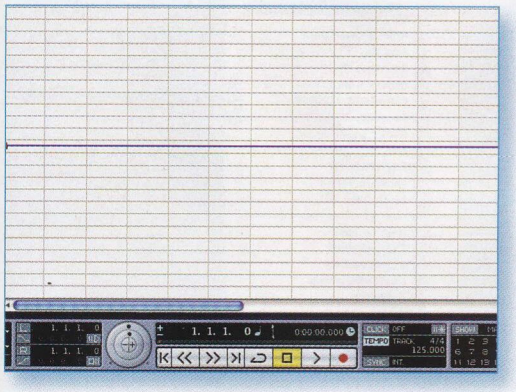
EMS VCS 3

An historically unstable monstrosity, the British-made VCS 3 was primarily used to provide atonal sweeps and effects. We can use just about any modern plug-in to achieve some of the same sorts of sounds, assuming there's a noise generator onboard. Green Oak's Crystal will do the job nicely.

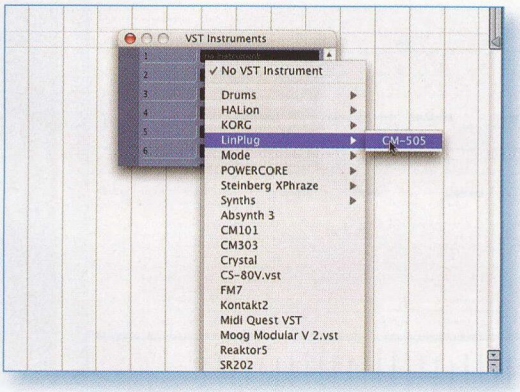
ARP 2600

The ARP 2600 has been painstakingly reproduced in the form of two plug-in emulations, but being skinflints, we'll turn instead to our own CM-101, as well as Cubase SX's built-in A1 to fill the roles that might have been played by the venerable semi-modular 'Blue Meanie'.

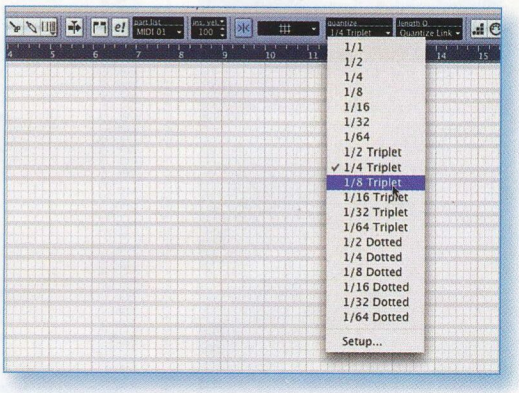
STEP BY STEP Get with the rhythm



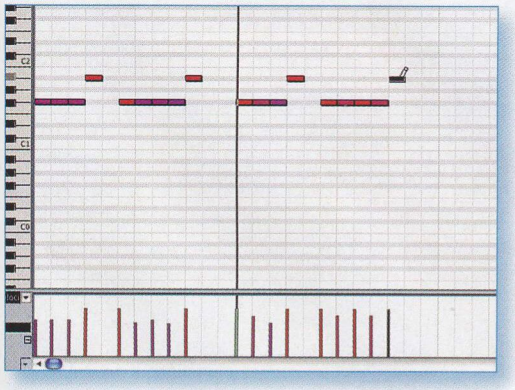
1 The first thing we need to do is to create a new project in our host of choice. We're using Cubase SX 3, but you can use whatever sequencer you like – you'll still be able to follow along. In your new project, set the tempo to a sprightly **125bpm**. »



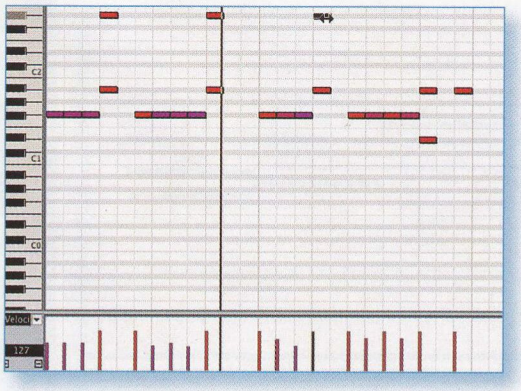
2 Jarre used a lot of different rhythm boxes on *Oxygene*. Fortunately, we've provided you with a versatile electronic percussion plug-in in the form of the CM-505. Open up an instance and select the preset called **CM505**. »



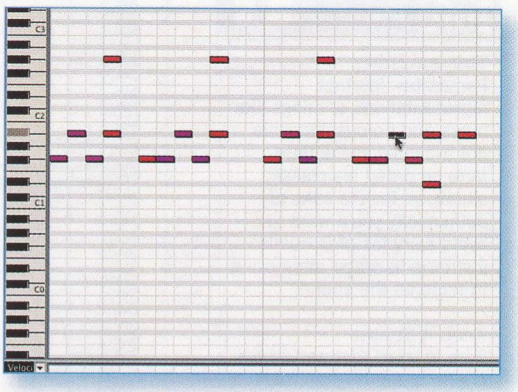
3 Next, create a two- or three-bar MIDI part and open the step-editor. Jean Michel Jarre uses a lot of triplets in his music. Choose a grid value of 8th-note triplets. »



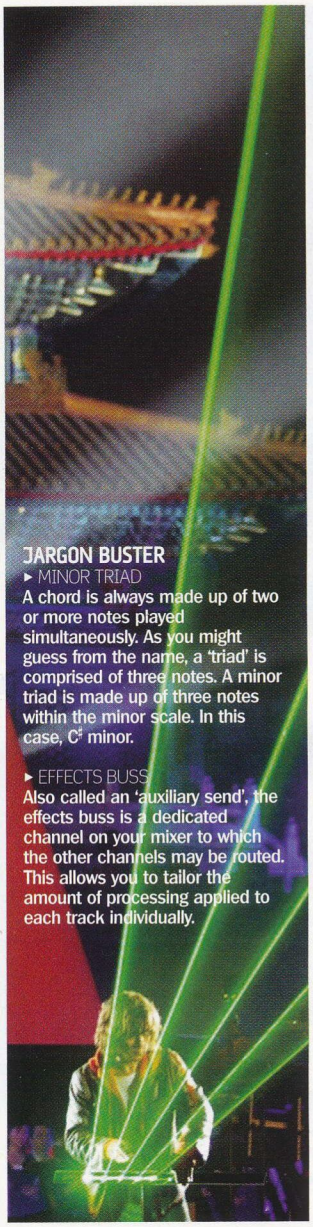
4 Now let's enter some drum notes into our pattern. Here, as you can see, we've entered three closed hi-hat notes, followed by an open hat. This alternates with a pattern of four closed hats and an open hat. The result is the galloping rhythm common to Jarre's music. »



5 If you listen closely to the rhythms on **Oxygene**, you'll notice that there isn't anything like a normal kick drum. You can put one in if you like, to sort of 'modernise' your sound. We chose not to. We have, however, added a castanet sound, as well as the CM-505 **Pop** sound. »



6 Due to the primitive nature of the beatboxes available at the time, Jarre's rhythms don't tend to change a lot during the course of a tune. Still, it might be nice to throw in a variation or two to keep things from getting stagnant. Here, we've moved the hats about a little.



JARGON BUSTER

▸ MINOR TRIAD

A chord is always made up of two or more notes played simultaneously. As you might guess from the name, a 'triad' is comprised of three notes. A minor triad is made up of three notes within the minor scale. In this case, C♯ minor.

▸ EFFECTS BUSS

Also called an 'auxiliary send', the effects buss is a dedicated channel on your mixer to which the other channels may be routed. This allows you to tailor the amount of processing applied to each track individually.

Info

The real thing

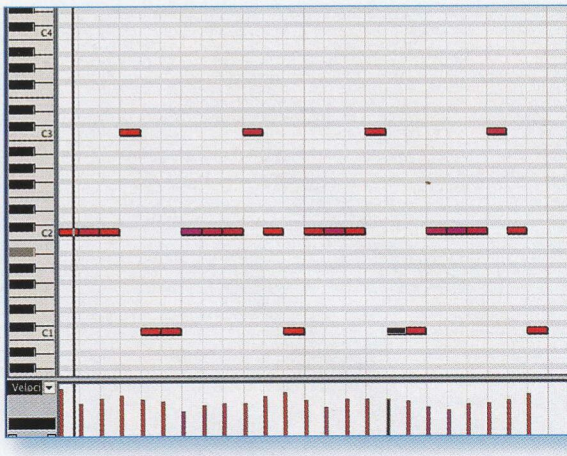
Remember, 'perfect' representations of things like brass and percussion were not available at the time Jarre recorded his classic album, so for the sake of authenticity you'll want to avoid samples of acoustic instruments when attempting to recreate the sound.

Keep it simple

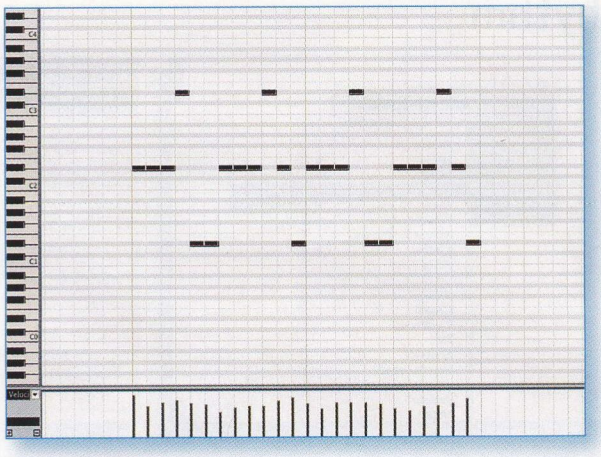
Bear in mind that part of the charm of the original track was that it was recorded in a modest (by today's standards) home studio. Jarre was probably limited to eight mono tracks. Remember this and try to keep the mix uncluttered.

STEP BY STEP Instrumentation

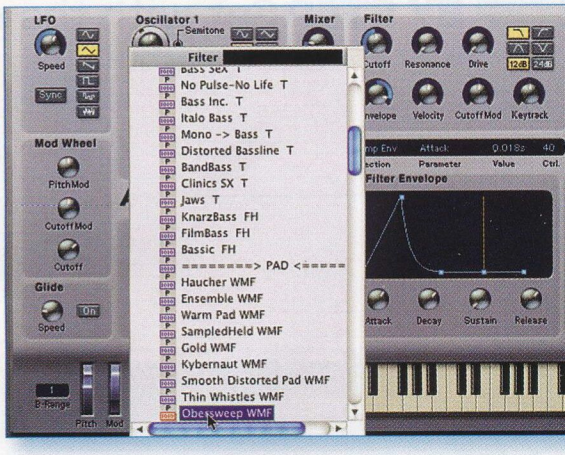
1 Many electronic musicians, such as Jarre, Tangerine Dream and others, made use of analogue sequencers as an integral part of their rhythm tracks. There's a percolating sequencer line that runs throughout *Oxygene (Part IV)*. To recreate this, let's call up an instance of our CM-101. »



2 Load in the preset patch **CMSeqBass**. Create a two-bar sequenc using this bass sound. Try to copy the pattern shown here, using all C notes (The track is in the key of **C♯m**). Play it along with the percussion and adjust to taste. »



3 Unlike some of his contemporaries, Jean Michel Jarre has never been content to let a sequence rattle along the same path relentlessly. Copy the main sequence, then transpose the copies. Move one onto the D♯ and another onto A♯. »

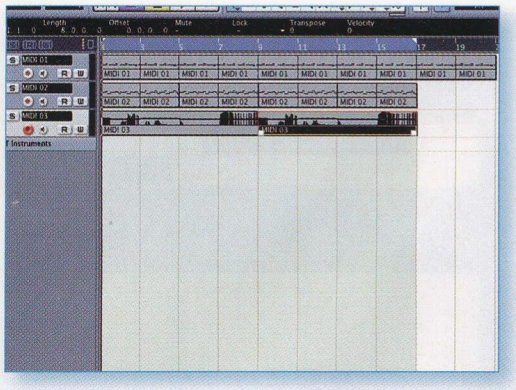


4 Jarre made much use of various string and choir devices, including Mellotrons, the RMI Synth and others. We can get a great synth string sound from Cubase SX's built-in A1 synth. Cal up the preset **Obersweep**. »

5 Using the A1, create a progression of sustained minor triad chords, as we've done here. Each one is held for two bars. If you can, play this by hand for a more authentic sound. Re-trigger any notes that are repeated from bar to bar. »

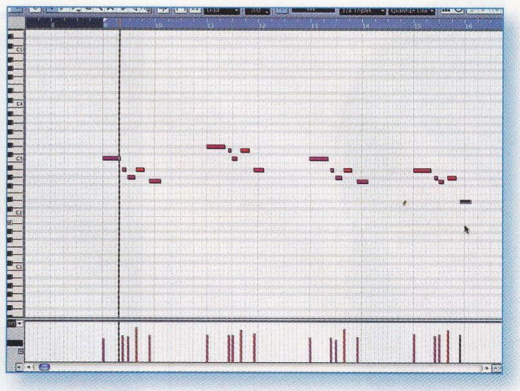
6 Finally, to give our strings a more vintage sound, we'll want to ad a healthy amount of chorus effect. Initially intended to fake the sound of multiple instruments, chorus effects had a distinctive sound and were very popular among the musicians of the era.

STEP BY STEP Making arrangements

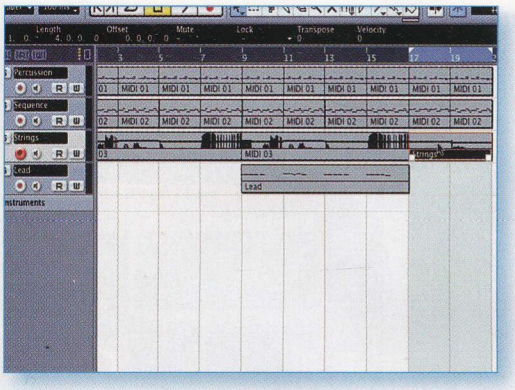


1 Let's begin putting some of the basic arrangement together, and then adding some sounds. We'll create a sort of 'verse/chorus' arrangement, beginning with the verse. Duplicate your main patterns so that they look like the screenshot above. »

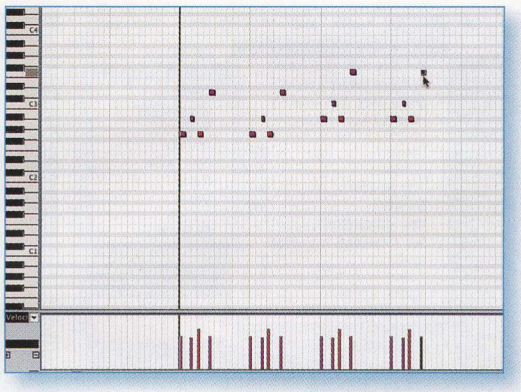
2 It might be a good time to name your tracks, so you don't get confused. When you're finished, call up another CM-101. We'll be using this to play a brassy lead sound, not unlike the one Jarre plays on his track. »



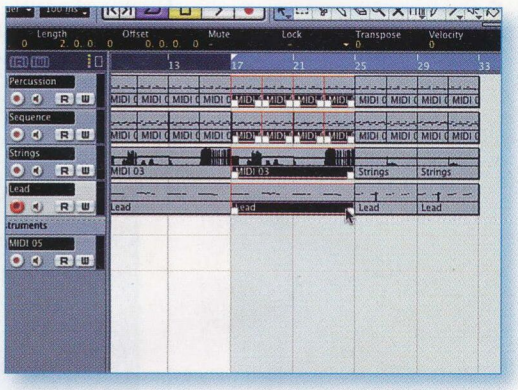
3 Import the **JMJLead** patch from the cover DVD. This is a variation on the simple brass patch that comes with the CM-101. It should do quite nicely. Using that lead sound, record or program a passage like the one shown. »



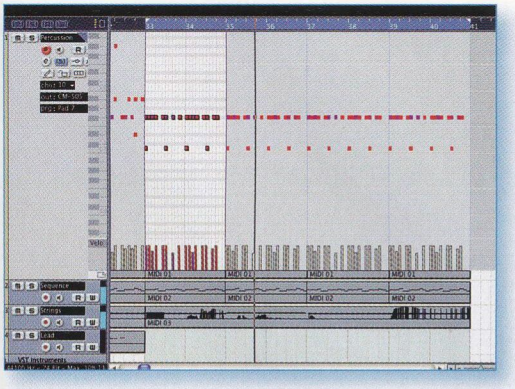
4 Now, let's create a sort of 'chorus' part at bar 17. We've used our rhythm variation here, and duplicated and transposed the bass sequence. First, we bumped it up to G, then F. We also put down a new set of string chords. »



5 Once we've that done, let's add another lead progression. This time, change the rhythm of the lead slightly, and play a little motif based around the notes in our chords. Again, it would be best to play this 'live'. »

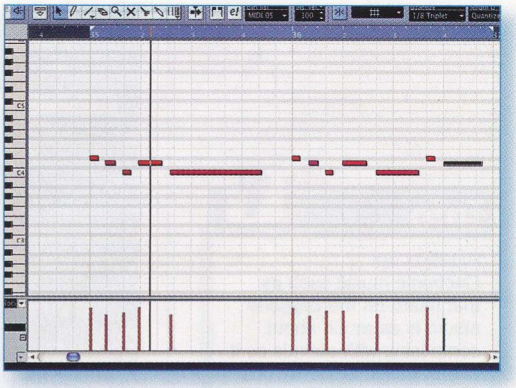


6 Listening to the track, we decide that we need to move the 'chorus' section from bar 17 to bar 25, and then copy and paste the 'verse' section to repeat again at bar 17. Jarre would likely follow the chorus with a change, and so will we. »



7 As you can see in the screenshot above, we've duplicated the sequence and strings from the chorus at bar 33. We then open the drum sequence and edit it to provide a much simpler beat. This would be the equivalent of the 'middle eight' in a pop song. »

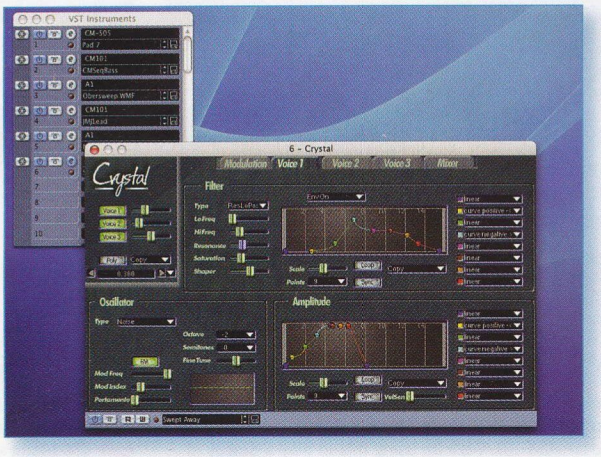
8 There's a great oscillator-sync lead in the original tune that comes in after the main riff. This would be a good place to do something similar. For that, we'll again call upon the A1. This time, call up the **Nice N Fine** patch. »



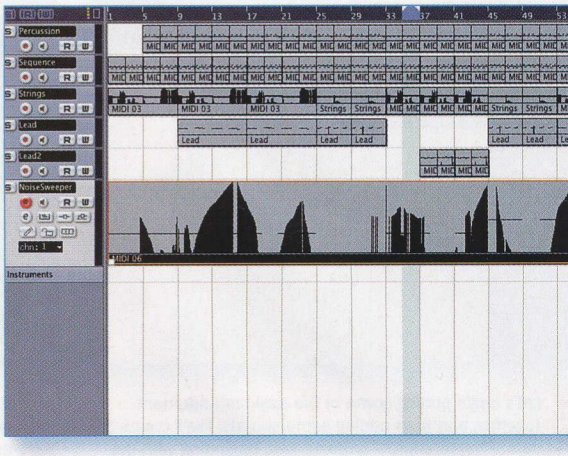
9 Finally, using the **Nice N Fine** lead sound, record a jaunty riff beginning at bar 33. It should be a bit busier than our main lead sound from the CM-101. Take a listen to our example to get some ideas (but let's not copy Jarre too exactly!).

Sound like... Jean Michel Jarre

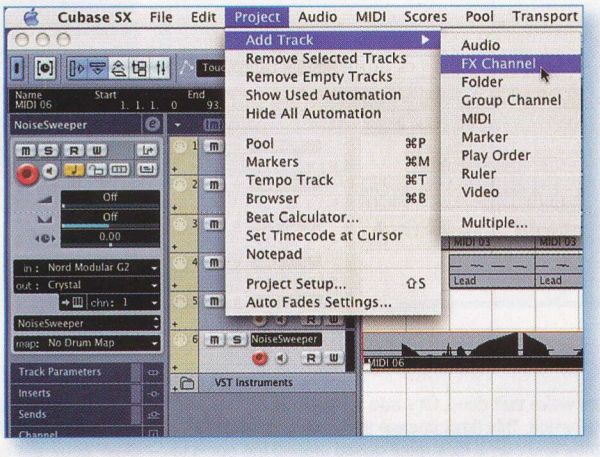
STEP BY STEP Finishing up



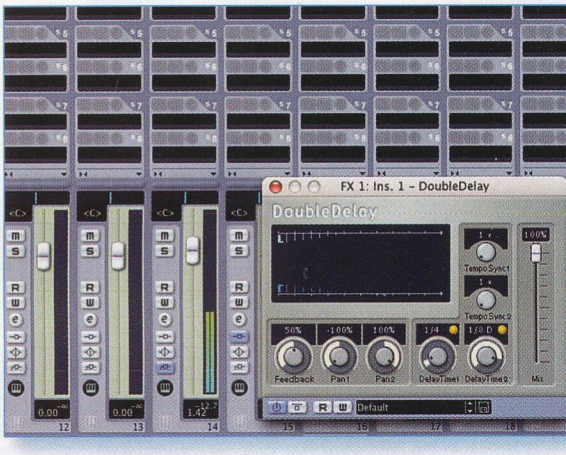
1 After arranging and rearranging until we have something we like, we need to turn to effects and atmospheres. The notoriously unstable EMS instruments often provided the atmospheric stuff. We can get some nice sweeps with Crystal (**www.greenoak.com**). »



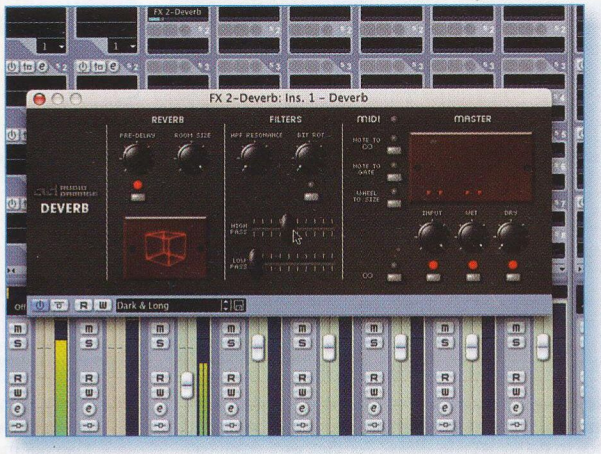
2 Load the Crystal patch **NoiseSweeper** from the cover DVD, and d some live jamming with the patch over the entire track. Try to create a sense of drama and tension. There's already a lot of modulation in the patch. »



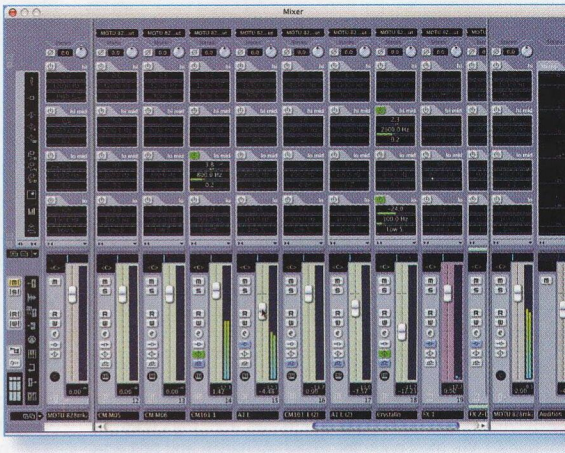
3 Like many of the electronic musicians of the time, Jarre liked his tape echoes. Create an FX track or buss and insert a delay plug-in. Jarre had to synchronize his delays by ear, but we can make use of tempo sync. Thank goodness. »



4 Next, set the delay to a value of quarter notes and, if possible, dotted eighth notes. Send the Crystal track to it, as well as the lead sounds. Maybe a bit of the sequence too. Just this one effect makes the entire song sound a bit more authentic. »



5 Now we need a good old-fashioned tinny reverb. For that, there's nothing better than Audio Damage's inexpensive **Deverb**. We've set the mix to **100% wet**, and tossed our drums, second lead and Crystal through it. »



6 After you've got it all worked out, it's time to turn to the final mixdown. This is purely a matter of personal taste. Have a listen to our own mix to see what we did with the track. It might inspire you to light some incense!

JARGON BUSTER

▸MODULATION

When describing synthesis, modulation is any function that can be used to alter a destination parameter. For instance, you might use an LFO or velocity to modulate a filter's cutoff frequency.

Info

Patch it up

Electronic music such as that heard on the *Oxygene* album is as much about composing with sounds as it is with notes. Be conscious of where each synth patch sits in the mix. Try to get the sound right by tweaking patches instead of EQing. You have the luxury of total recall of your project and patches… Jean Michel Jarre most certainly did not.